

THE MEASURE

A JOURNAL OF POETRY



Nineteen Poems by Americans of the Younger
Generation — — — — —

An Open Letter to Writers of Verse — — —
— — — — — by Maxwell Anderson

In Defense of Long Poems — by Mark Van Doren

Three Young Poets — a Review by Padraic Colum

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Fog

WHERE does the sea end and the sky begin?
We sink in blue for which there is no word.
Two sails, fog-coloured, loiter on the thin
Mirage of ocean.
There is no sound of wind, nor wave, nor bird,
Nor any motion
Except the shifting mists that turn and lift,
Showing behind the two limp sails a third,
Then blotting it again.

A gust, a spattering of rain,
The lazy water breaks in nervous rings.
Somewhere a bleak bell buoy sings,
Muffled at first, then clear,
Its wet, grey monotone.

The dead are here.
We are not quite alone.

Robert Hillyer

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Disillusion

PUREST, without a shade of guile,
Passionless girlhood of untroubled eyes,
And April mornings in your smile,—
Love, like a bright bird, flies
To build him an eternal nest
In your still, lovely breast.

No, do not ask me to approach:
I would be one who worships you afar;
The storm-blown cloud shall not encroach
On the immaculate star;
The wandering sea-gull shall not teach
The thrush his strident speech.

Foolish and innocent, forbear;
Your day shall not invade my secret night.
What have you tasted of despair?
Of desperate delight?
What is this ecstasy, this autumn fear?
This subtle voice I hear?

Changeling, for all the grace you seem,
For all the purity I found in you,
I am the richer by one dream,
And stars explored anew.
The light you never were has led me far
From the darkness that you are.

Robert Hillyer

Warning

O^N the dry leaves,
In letters of white fire,
The frost has written:
M'ne M'ne Tekel Upharsin.
And all night long
I heard the oaks
Tearing their beards in lamentation,
And the maples
Rending their garments
Stained in the feast days;
While some Daniel of the wind
Arose among them
And spoke in gusts of prophecy:
"The torch-carriers in the armies of the snow
Shall burn your days
Like wooden houses!
The idol-makers of the hail
Shall come with chisels and hammers
And beat upon you,
Till you stand like carved silences;
And nothing shall live in you
Save death,—
And nothing shall stir in the land
Save the wings of the black angel!"

David Rosenthal

Insanity

MY mind is dark with shadows of a sea
That creeps unheard across a barren sand
And breaks unheard in silence over me.

Yet,—smooth as any woman's breast is mine,
My limbs sweep slenderly in line,
My yearning arms, voluptuous and white
Encircle night.
He clasps me close and lays his cooling lips
Against my throat and curves his darkling form,
His cloud-streaked hair across my bosom slips
And down he broods in storm.
Passion is freed, he rages in desire,
His arms press lightning from me and I lie
Formless and loose about him, higher, higher,
He lashes me and drops me from the sky
To prostrate lands,
And there beside me stretches in the sands
While strange dew shines against his hair
And all hours long the paled moon creeps by
To watch us lying there.

My mind is dark, yet smoother is my breast
Than any other woman's,—I must rest,
Within these waters pain may slip from me,
My mind is dark with shadows of a sea.

Eda Lou Walton

Finality

LITTLE town, this is our goodbye,
Neither of us desire new meeting.
Through my life
Your crooked streets
Have worn down beaten paths
Deep into the dust
Of circumstance;
Through my mind
Your uncouth dwellers
Have bitten deep arroyos
Filled with sand.
Even the turbulent flood waters
Of my hatred
Cannot wash them
Clean to rock.
Neither the whiteness of a four-squared city,
Nor the sweet, untrampled green of fields
Can smooth from me your impress.
Nor will you forget my treading
In stern restlessness your hills,
Nor will you forget my bitterness.
For my tears shall split the granite rocks
Above you,
My desires
Even yet shall burn you;
All my yearning shall disquiet you
Even when I am dead!

Eda Lou Walton

Words for Departure

I.

NOTHING was remembered, nothing forgotten,
When we awoke wagons were passing on the warm summer pavements,
The windowsills were wet from rain in the night,
Birds scattered and settled over chimneypots
As among grotesque trees.

Nothing was accepted, nothing looked beyond.
Slight voiced bells separated hour from hour,
Afternoon sifted coolness
And people drew together in streets becoming deserted.
There was a moon, and a light in a shop front,
And dusk falling like precipitous water.

Hand clasped hand,
Forehead still bowed to forehead—
Nothing was lost, nothing possessed,
There was no gift nor denial.

2.

I have remembered you.
You were not the town visited once,
Nor the road falling behind running free.

You were as awkward as flesh
And lighter than frost or ashes.

You were the rind,
And the white juiced apple,
The song and the words waiting for music.

You have learned the beginning.
Go from mine to the other.

Be together; eat, dance, despair,
Sleep, be threatened, endure.
You will know the way of that.

But at the end, be insolent;
Be absurd—strike the thing short off.
Be mad—only do not let talk
Wear the bloom from silence.

And go away without fire or lantern;
Let there be some uncertainty about your departure.

Louise Bogan

Death

YOU are generous to me, my Dead.
You yield me the boon to forget you.
I cannot take your gift.
Always, to the end,
I shall slip blindly into hollows,
Blurred hollows of my unclaimed love,
As one who follows blown steps in a snow storm. . . .
Death has estranged me from you—
As did life.

Kathryn White Ryan

To One Who Smiles at My Simplicity

IF, as you say, O wise one,
And as I one time said,
Life cannot care for persons
And all the dead are dead,

Yet, even so, I'll salvage
Part of the desperate stake:
I shall not sleep less deeply
Because I thought to wake.

No roar of great wings passing
Above my dusty head
Shall mock me, if, you winning,
Your dead world holds me, dead.

Karle Wilson Baker

Going Home

THE feverish day has burned into quiet evening;
The warm brown web of darkness clings around earth's children;
Tired laborers stumble home along the dust-white road,
And patiently the earth moves on beneath the stars.

Archie Binns

The Hunt

LIFE, the huntsman, winds his horn
At the dawn of day,
Youth makes answer echo borne,
Far and far away,
Youth comes breaking through the thorn,
Shouting for his prey.

Youth and Life together ride,
And much they find to kill,
Youth's chatter wakes the countryside,
Life is a huntsman still;
The furry things crept home and died,
Or helped the bag to fill.

At length the day ran to its end,
The sky leaped up in red,
Youth had no arrows more to send,
The little beasts were dead.
Life rode his stirrups, "Ho, my friend,
"Now for the hunt!" he said.

Youth leaped to earth and flung around,
"Who hunts in the blinding dark?"
But a spear sang past with a whistling sound,
And a bolt ripped a sapling's bark;
"The bag's not full," cried Life, and ground
An edge that struck a spark.

Then in the dark all silently,
They grappled for a hold,
A white mist rose—they could not see,
At dawn the wind blew cold.
And Youth? But the gray thing by the tree
Was a man who had grown old!

Hortense Flexner

“That I Do Love You”

THAT I do love you, dear, accept this verse
As my avowal. That my love is such
As poets find occasion to rehearse,
I here deny that I love half that much.
As when a sailor on some voyage bent
Stops at an unknown island, there to find,
After the sea's rough way, pleasure, content,
With all the warmth of life brought back to mind,

Yet not unmindful of his voyage puts forth
To breast again the old cross-winded sea,
And finds some pleasure, holding to the north,
In following out his harder destiny,

So did I find thee, dear, and with some pain,
Vowing I love thee, put to sea again.

Jerome Head

“When We Shall Part”

WHEN we shall part you will not weep for me
And I'll not weep. But sometimes in the night,
Forgetful limbs will stir and lips will smile,
Dreaming that anciently I lived awhile
Where pools touched pools in necklaces of light
And ferns, at dawn, uncurled abundantly!

Mary Vinson Stephens

Japanese Night-Song

THE shadow of a heron's wing is on the water,
And the pines have drawn slim fingers
Across the moon.

Hush—

Breathe lightly, wind in the plum-tree!
Scatter your dreams
Like petals over her heart.

Chinese Night-Song

THE dragon Night has burned the sky
With his red tongue,
And left it gray in ashes.

Sleep, Heart of the Jasmine-flower.
It is his one great eye
That is shining on the still junks in the river.
Soon the warrior Dawn will slay him
With a sword of light!

“Shadowy—Under My Window”

S HADOWY—under my window—
Your low reed sobs
Its desert love-song to the remembering stars.
Shadowy—
All the night my breasts are lilies,
My lips are passion-flowers.

At dawn
I remember how gray sands have heaped
Upon your grave,
Wind-blown—these thousand years.

Ellen Janson

Carolina Coast Country

GARDENS ON THE SANTEE

THE river folds a love-bent arm
about the terraces.
The afternoon stretches its shining length
and sleeps.

Walled in by hedges,
the pools of perfume deepen,
fed by hidden springs of jasmine
and grass tangled roses.

I have come too late.
A lovely play is over
and the stage is empty.

But I have heard,
as one half hears, half dreams,
last sounds of festivals
at the distant turn of some long avenue,
I have heard
the brittle sound of brocade
and the gay passage of red and silver heels
behind azalea banks;
I have heard the tournament of swift hoofs
along the road,
and the slow circling sound
of negro boatsongs
from the river bend.

. . . I have gone softly,
hoping to surprise some prospect
fresh from the presence
of those eager players of the play.

Now—

the river's cloudy deep brims purple,
and I find at garden end
a fallen tree
holding one moon white bloom,
. . . overhead, the mourning flags of moss
salute the pomp of silence
and of night.

SAND HILLS

The world is spread with rough grained silk,
crumpled a little where the sky indents it
and cuts off the view.

The very old gods,
long since tired of northern lights
and seas too jeweled
and snows too glittering,—
tired, too, of men,—
the very old gods come here
in the late evening
to sit quietly on the warm gray silk
and rest their eyes
with milky opal tints
and the smoky blue
flecked by the dim fire of giant stars.

Henry Bellamann

The Ailanthus Tree

SHE has few leaves left to see by,
And her straggling boughs
No longer hide from the tenement windows
The ailanthus tree that is going blind so young.
Swarming with sparrows,
She squats like a beggar at back doors,
And rocks in the wind
That sidles to her through the clothes-lines.
But at the least glance of the sun—
Swaggering provocatively over high roofs—
The leaves, waxen-green,
That play precariously on ends of boughs,
Light up shyly . . . and with an eager glisten.

Lola Ridge

Under Alders

UNDER alders
Enchanting waters run.
Set mouth to mountain waters
Before they see the sun
And dry mouth on fern backs
That filter sun to shade.
For of fern and mountain waters
Is green blood made.

Dare Stark

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ACTING EDITOR FOR MARCH, APRIL, AND MAY—MAXWELL ANDERSON

ASSISTANT FOR THE SAME TERM—LOUISE TOWNSEND NICHOLL

An Open Letter to Writers of Verse

“**I** FANCY I detect throughout THE MEASURE a tendency toward the ‘pretty,’ the slight, the gracefully commonplace.” So writes a candid friend, fearful lest we decline into a vehicle for second-rate Georgian lyrics. No graver or more scathing criticism could be levelled at a magazine of poetry. And it must be confessed there is enough truth in it so far to challenge explanation. The gracefully commonplace is not its own excuse for being.

Whoever handles poetry in manuscript discovers there are two main varieties of verse written in the United States just now—one, a modern compound containing elements of Whitman, imagism, and Greenwich Village—the other, a more traditional blend that may have everything in it from Chaucer to the Shropshire Lad. These are the broad divisions of verse written; even, alas, of verse printed. But there is a small third variety, quite negligible in the bulk of manuscript, of verse both original in quality and of some excellence. It contains, let us say, that salt of the spirit for which no substitute has been found. Usually it falls into neither category named above. Good work is not the product of a school, not a mere blend, but the output of a keen, egotistical, independent intelligence backed by an extraordinary surcharge of emotion.

Few are the intelligences of this sort concerned with verse, and small indeed is their product. It doesn't begin to fill the yawning column ends of monthly and weekly periodicals. There is hardly enough of it, in truth, to create a demand among commercial magazines. Magazine verse, the

ordinary staple bought by the ordinary editor, must be drawn from one of the two great manuscript divisions—*melange vers libre* or *melange lyric*, and which the editor will choose depends on whether he claims to be a modernist or a moderate in literature. It depends largely, therefore, on his age. If he cut his teeth on the peachstone watch fobs of 1880 he'll buy imitations at seventh hand of Swinburne and Keats. If he was overseas with the A. E. F. he'll buy unrhymed and unrhythmed effusions.

But the editor of a journal of poetry has a harder choice to make. After he has gleaned what excellent work he can from the accumulation of envelopes on his desk he faces the job of deciding what else he shall print. It is the fashion, among editors of magazines with a conscience—mostly endowed, as it happens—to choose the unhappy remainder from among pieces written in disregard of form. This is mainly because meter and rhyme are not in fashion. Broken lines are the mode, and even though a bit of verse has little else to recommend it, it will do passably well if the lines are broken. So written it conforms by rebelling, bows to the wind, slips past.

For half a year I read the manuscript verse that came into the office of *The New Republic*, and since *THE MEASURE* was announced I have been reading verse again, some of it the same, from the four quarters of our sporadically intelligent land. And I conclude that uninspired verse in form is likely to be better than uninspired verse without form. If the poet is a mature artist he will write only when he has something to say, and he will say it well whether as a sonnet or in blocks of words. But if he is a stumbling craftsman he has some chance of building, by careful touches, a passable sonnet; whereas in free verse, with no outer discipline to restrain him, he blows up with a great splatter of language.

When it comes to a choice between the gracefully commonplace and the ungracefully commonplace, I admit a preference for grace. Music is a large part of poetry. A shabby theme revamped with verbal felicity is more to be desired than the same shabby theme, or another equally moth-riddled, flung on paper in the first casual manner that happened to occur to the writer. Also the more actual labor of composition bestowed on a segment of verse by a person of limited talent the more likely is it to contain some essence of wisdom, some fire from the slowly-kindled subconscious.

These last words, I note, might be taken to mean that we need nowadays a more personal quality in our annual output of lyric or narrative poetry to bring it nearer perfection. The trouble really is we have so little

else. Without a distinct, fighting individuality the poet is indeed lost, but possessing and expressing such an individuality is not enough. Poetry is an art, not a case-book of psycho-analytic confessions. What a man says or does is interesting to him because he said it or did it, but those who do not know him are interested in his experience only when it has been rounded into an artistic concept. Some create their own patterns—Whitman, for example, and H. D. But form there must be, and the labor of writing verse is the labor of shaping personal materials to traditional or recognizable moulds. The majority of the writers of free verse set down their emotions and intellectual processes in the rough and expect instant sympathy and understanding. But one can't reasonably expect sympathy and understanding for a lump of wet clay on a studio table.

The poet who seeks the success that lies beyond journalistic acclamation will develop an aristocratic, artistic conscience, will write only when the urge is authentic, will set his own standards and be his own censor instead of thanking heaven when he can get hurried tag-ends into print. He will respect himself and his medium too much to cheapen either on the market. But I grow solemn. . . . Let the reader who has followed the argument to this issue bring it to what end he will. . . .

Maxwell Anderson.

In Defense of Long Poems

THE most deplorable delusion now being cherished by persons in the literary world—publishers, critics, and authors—is the delusion that long poems cannot be read. It is perfectly clear to me that they can be and are—or would be if they were being written. I know for certain that I want right now to settle down to a poem which begins back at the beginning of something, goes a respectable distance in a straight line, and ends by bringing me to a place where my imagination has never been. I happen to read most of the verse that comes out in the form of books, but all too rarely do I have the experience I speak of. Poets seem to have forgotten how to take long breaths, and publishers seem to have determined never again to take long chances.

In so far as the poverty of poetry in any generation—and all generations, the gods know, are poor enough—is chargeable to the fact that puny poets exist and prevail, my complaint can have no point, for puny poets always must write puny poems, in size no less than in soul. I am complain-

ing to and against those very considerable minds that uphold the heresy of shortness for the sake of shortness, that preach intolerance of all that is not intense. I do not deny the indecency of dullness, and I believe that it is distinctly worth while to do a small thing perfectly, but I believe it to be still more worth while to do a large thing well, and I wish that more poets today would sit down to do large things.

Six years ago, when Amy Lowell, John Gould Fletcher, Richard Aldington, F. S. Flint, "H. D.," and D. H. Lawrence issued their Imagist manifesto in favor of hard perfection and irreducible concentration, they cited Aristotle as one who presumably would be on their side. Now Aristotle would, of course, be on the side of perfection, and he would, of course, prefer hardness and concentration to certain of the virtues say of Tennyson. But Aristotle is not the most comfortable of critics to quote if you are a doer of small things, for Aristotle's favorite word is not perfection or concentration, but magnitude. "The longer the story, consistently with its being comprehensible as a whole," he says, "the finer it is by reason of its magnitude."

The story! Then I am confining myself to narrative poetry. And why not? Why not, after all, ask for poems that concern themselves with human beings who somehow act, and act significantly? Doubtless it is a valuable experience for a poet to close in on himself and decide precisely what it is that goes on when he looks at the sun or the moon, the hair of a child, or a diamond in cinders. But it is an experience which poets and the publishers of poets have been spending ten years in England and America making commonplace, and it is an experience not to be compared in the long run with that of creating characters who can move through space and grow through time. Given space and time, there will be perspective, and given perspective there may be wisdom. It was something more noble than a crotchet in Samuel Butler, I think, that led him eventually to ignore all poets save the great narrators, Homer and Shakespeare, nor can it be a freak of chance today that gives John Masfield vogue. I am but one of many who want a tale in verse, and want it long.

Mark Van Doren.

Three Young Poets

Poems, by Haniel Long, New York, Moffat, Yard & Co.

Young Girl, by Hildegard Flanner, San Francisco, H. S. Crocker Co.

In American, by J. V. A. Weaver, New York, Alfred A. Knopf.

HERE are three books that have conspicuously the qualities of youth—its expectancy, its eager desire, its Narcissus raptures. One could make the nucleus of an anthology of Poems of the Twenties from these three volumes.

Let us take Mr. J. V. A. Weaver first. Unlike the other two he is objective; he puts his mood almost invariably into the form of a dramatic utterance. Mr. Weaver has taken adolescence on the side of its very direct desire and in a few of his poems he is able to give to adolescence a characteristic and passionate utterance.

Walt Whitman in one of his criticisms speaks of "the eternal race of lads and lassies." Mr. Weaver's lads frequent pool-rooms and his lassies work their eight hours a day in a shop. They are unsophisticated intellectually; indeed, they are hardly literate, but there is no doubt that they belong to the "eternal race." And the youth who writes about them makes no attempt to give them an idyllic background; he writes of them from their own level and in their own idiom. He is at his best in the sonnets "In American"—"In Love," "Nocturne," "Au Revoir," "Finis" and in "Denouement." He tells stories in this sharp idiom he has mastered, and tells them very well, but he is at his best when he gets to a sort of stabbing personal speech. Once or twice he spoils an unsophisticated utterance by an image that is literary and banal, as when he makes a girl say "the big arc-light moon grins down so cool." It should do anything but "grin" or be "cool;" and it would be very well if it were not there at all. The line, too, is bad metrically. And Mr. Weaver should learn that just because the speech he uses is loose he will have to be doubly careful about his phrases. But when all this is said there is in "In American" a real if not a manifold experience.

Miss Flanner's is a very brief collection. Aesthetically she is more sophisticated than Mr. Weaver, and her poems in the new and the traditional forms are charming. "Discovery" with its naive consciousness of the flesh, "Birds" with its fresh and delightful images, "Birch Grove" with its quaint little pictures, are memorable poems. There is in this brief collection a sense of limitation. These are strictly the poems of a young girl. We are conscious that the poet goes from a house into a garden, and that

the garden has a boundary to which she only lifts her eyes. Nevertheless, even if she does not pass beyond the boundary, Miss Flanner has given us some poems that we shall cherish.

Mr. Haniel Long is youthful, too, but youthful in a way more varied than Mr. Weaver or Miss Flanner. Instead of the city street of J. V. A. Weaver he gives us the variety of hill and valley under the light of the moon. And the moon to him is no "arc-light" moon—it is the moon of Endymion, Selene. Again and again, for a surprising number of times, the Endymion motive is repeated in these poems.

Mr. Haniel Long is nympholept; all his poems have to do with dehumanized desires touched by the magic of wild nature. And a great many of these poems are mighty good. I like especially "The Herd Boy" (a poem in the style of "The Shropshire Lad") but with a more romantic beauty; "The Three Quakers," "The Midnight Swim," "The Conspiracy," and the three poems about King Alexander. Some of these poems have even the salt of wit. But even although Mr. Haniel Long is accomplished and has a whole world of his own to draw upon, there is need for him to ponder some things in his heart. First, he is dealing with the detritus of the romantic movement—of the romantic movement that includes Baudelaire, and he has not won to new uplands. Secondly, he has a great facility in using his material and his forms, and such facility often wins a man away from the rare and lonely which poetry may not be won away from. He has in his book the reply of one who was reproved for writing a thousand poems. One feels that Mr. Haniel Long might be able to write nearly a thousand. But it would be well for him to make a renunciation.

O proud rejection of what cannot be
That gives the oak its majesty!

he exclaims in the wisest of his poems. He, like Alexander, must be proud in his rejection.

Padraic Colum.